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ABSTRACT

The collaborative teaching/learning model encompasses peer and cross age tutoring, as well as team teaching, consulting, and professional pairing on the part of teachers, and focuses on learning as a cooperative rather than competitive process for nondisabled and disabled students. Rewards accrue to the tutee (such as increased individualized attention, influence of a role model, and gains in self esteem) as well as to the tutor (including increased competence in academic areas and improved social skills). The teacher is given such benefits as increased opportunity for individualizing, development of partnerships with other teachers, greater attention given to low performers, and development of more positive attitudes. (CL)

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Partner Learning: Concept and Rationale

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Partner Learning: Concept and Rationale

This paper will explore the concept of partner learning. The collaborative teaching/learning model is not limited to peer and cross age tutoring for students at the elementary and secondary levels, but also includes team teaching, consulting, and professional pairing on the higher education and adult education levels.

Students from elementary school through higher education are not trained to use each other as resources. Traditionally, they look to the teacher as the source of information and help. Neither have teachers been trained to use their colleagues as resources, but rely instead on courses and workshops for new information and training, and on administrative direction for collaboration.

Traditional modes of learning in our schools have placed emphasis on individualizing instruction i.e., self-paced instruction, and competition. Math teachers, for example, have endeavored to design individual math folders to enable students to progress at their own rates. Self-paced and computerized instructional programs are designed with the individual student in mind. Traditional grading systems and honor rolls foster competition. Students involved in spelling bees and other learning games are in competition with one another. "While the spotlight has been on the ways that students interact with materials and the role of the teacher, very little attention has been given to how students should relate to each other while

working on instructional tasks." (Johnson, 1975) Competitive and individualized learning situations focus on "getting it right." These approaches to learning are outcome rather than process-oriented.

The collaborative learning mode, on the other hand, focuses on learning as a cooperative undertaking and addresses the process as well as the outcome. People working together in helping relationships share not only the answers, but the processes used to derive the answers also.

Coleman in Youth: Transition to Adulthood (1974) examines environments available for young persons while making the transition to adulthood. He states that youth should have an opportunity for responsibilities that affect the lives of other people. Through experiences such as caring for younger persons, the child learns the kind of behavior required of a socially responsible adult. The opportunity to be involved in helping relationships has traditionally not been available in our schools. There is evidence that youth involved in volunteer service such as the Peace Corps (Gillette, 1968) benefited personally as well as professionally from the experience. "Only with the experience of such responsibilities can youth move toward the mutually responsible and mutually rewarding involvement with others that constitute social maturity" (Coleman, 1974, P.3).

Entering into a partnership, then, can have rewards which extend beyond the term of the project. People working together may complete a specified assignment and might acquire valuable interpersonal skills as well. Since effective communications skills are central to the success of the collaborative learning,

mode, they can become a focus of the training.

There is an abundance of knowledge and expertise around us, if we only knew how to get the most out of our partnerships. Good partnerships don't just happen. Helping relationships must be carefully structured.

RATIONALE FOR PARTNER LEARNING

Entering into a partnership has many benefits which are well documented in the research literature. The most obvious for both partners is skill acquisition. In partnerships which take the form of peer and cross age tutoring, both the tutor and the tutee have been shown to acquire academic skills.

Benefits for the Tutee

Research findings have consistently shown that students do make significant academic gains after being tutored by other students. In general, benefits for the tutee fall into 4 categories:

1. Increased individualized attention

Peer tutoring is a classic example of the one-to-one teaching situation, where the material to be learned can be closely matched to the learner's level on a sequence of skills. In addition, in a one-to-one situation, there are more immediate and frequent opportunities for the tutee to receive praise and/or corrections on her performance.

In a study conducted by Jenkins et.al. (1974), teacher-led small group instruction was compared with one-to-one instruction delivered by cross-age tutors. The students were eligible for service in special education resource rooms and the tutors were students in regular 3rd and

4th grade classes who had been trained as tutors and had worked in that role for several months. The results showed that students acquired more skills when a peer was conducting one-to-one instruction that when teachers taught small groups.

2. Increased contact and opportunity for closeness with the instructor and corresponding learning efficiency.

An examination of the social interaction occurring within partnerships reveals that the emotional component may be an important factor contributing to learning. A bond of friendship can develop between the tutor and the tutee which enhances the instructional situation.

In a classroom situation, teachers often have no more to go on than facial expressions and gestures (non-verbal cues) as indicators to student understanding.

The fact that children spend time with each other facilitates their ability to decipher their own non-verbal behavior. Thus, children may be more skilled than adults in interpreting non-verbal cues indicative of another child's comprehension.

Allen and Feldman (1975) examined the accuracy of children and adults in interpreting non-verbal responses. Through the use of videotapes, they made records of a child listening to a difficult and an easy lesson. The films were then shown to other children and adults who were asked to estimate how much each child understood the lesson. Results showed that children were more sensitive than adults to non-verbal cues indicative of a child's

comprehension.

Children may be able to communicate more effectively with each other than adults can communicate with children. Thus, the material may be learned more efficiently. Schaltz and Gelman (1973) found that older students made simpler and shorter statements when speaking with younger students and made special efforts to keep interest and attention. Good and Brophy (1978) suggest that vocabulary and examples used by adults may be too complex for younger children. They also state "successful tutoring may demand direct instruction, whereas adults tend to be indirect."

Cohen and Stover (1981) conducted experiments designed to investigate the structural aspects of math word problems which appeared to be difficult for students. In one experiment gifted students rewrote typical math textbook word problems to make them easier to understand for peers who acheived less well in math. Results showed that the naive unprofessional students perceived word problem difficulty as a reading, rather than a math challenge. Among other things, they simplified the vocabulary, shortened information, added extra clues and a diagram.

These research examples provide evidence to show that students trained as teachers may be able to find better ways to get the material to be learned across to students, ways which may be more efficient just because the "teacher" and student are closer in age.

3. Influence of a role model

Research on one-teacher schools (Allen and Devin-Sheehan, 1974) showed that older children felt responsible

for younger ones. According to Allen and Feldman (1976) "being a role model for the younger child to imitate and 'look up to' may exert a very powerful influence in constraining the tutor's behavior along socially desirable channels." A student being tutored may try to imitate her tutor, identify with her, and try to be like her. Children whose tutors are well-trained have a chance to observe tutors who keep their attention on the learning materials, who ask questions designed to get the necessary information, who use efficent study skills such as using index of a textbook, who are interested in learning and who have good interpersonal skills.

4. Gains in self-esteem

Research by Lohman (1970) shows that age is positively valued by younger children. Since age is associated with valued characteristics such as increased size and strength, the younger child stands to gain in self-concept from association with an older child working in the "teacher role"

Gains in self-concept were reported by Ross (1972) in a program that required students labeled "disadvantaged" to tutor each other. The tutors were second-semester students in a compensatory basic studies program, while tutees were in their lst semester. Gains in reading scores and self-concept followed this semester-long program, the greatest gains being experienced by tutors who had themselves been tutees in previous semesters and their tutees.

Benefits for the tutor

Some critics of peer tutoring have argued that the tutor is

doing work which is the responsibility of the teacher and that only the tutee benefits from the partnership. However, there is abundant evidence to suggest that the tutor might profit as much or more than the child being tutored. Research indicates that tutoring experiences can sharpen the abilities of the tutor in the following areas:

1. Educational/subject areas

Many students have superficial knowledge of a subject area to the extent that they can "get it right" on the test. To teach another person, however, requires a deeper understanding of a math concept or word-attack skills. Thus, being a tutor should enhance the child's own academic abilities. In a study by Dineen et.al. (1977) designed to determine whether tutoring might be academically beneficial to the tutor, elementary students tutored their peers in the area of spelling. Results of the pre and post tests indicated that the tutoring sessions were beneficial to all students involved. Results indicated that tutoring a peer increased the tutors' spelling performance nearly as much as being tutored by a peer.

2. Self-esteem

Being associated with the prestigeful role of the teacher can go a long way toward increasing a child's self-esteem and positive attitudes toward school. Studies conducted in schools suggest that tutors judge themselves as being more competent in school after teaching another child. Gartner, Kohler and Riessman were more intrigued by changes in social behavior, attitudes and self-concept

for the child doing the tutoring than by improvement in learning in a study conducted in 1971.

3. Social Skills

In order to deal successfully with other persons, social skills are needed. These skills may appear to fall into the "common sense" category, because of the rather obvious importance of cooperation in adult success. Social/interpersonal skills are, in fact, rarely the focus of actual classroom instruction. Schools should give students many opportunities to carry out cooperative activities. Using role playing, students who are trained to work as tutors can be taught essential interpersonal skills such as giving statements of praise, encouragement, and affirmation. Students should also be taught how to give constructive criticism, make specific corrections and be assertive rather than aggressive. A critical component of the training in social skills is instruction of active listening. The technique of role playing has been evaluated by many studies as a training tool. Argyle (1969) found role playing to be effective in improving professional skills. In assertion training for students, various kinds of modeling, coaching and role play have been successful (Friedman, 1972).

4. The helping relationship

The most salient characteristic of the role of teacher is helping another person. In our schools students are typically the recipients of help from others rather than the givers. In terms of socialization, a possible positive consequence of placing students in the teacher role is

that they derive beneficial psychological dividends as a result of helping another person. Research has shown, for example, that college students working in the mental health field visited and socialized with patients in mental hospitals and were affected by the experience of being useful to the patients. It may be that feelings of increased personal competence led to results which showed more self-acceptance/awareness and tolerance of others (Halzberg, Knapp and Turner, 1966).

BENEFITS TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGER

1. Individualizing instruction

As we have mentioned previously, partner learning is an eminent example of individualized instruction in which students work together to acheive educational objectives. If the curriculum used is designed as a system -- a skills sequence which provides for regular assessment -- the teacher can identify exactly those skills which each student needs to learn next. Tutoring can then focus directly on critical outcomes of instruction for each child, thus "individualizing" an entire classroom. In this manner entire classrooms of partnerships were formed at a New England High School (Knight, et.al.), where students in several English classes needed to focus on passing the following Writing (spelling) Basic Competency as a requirement for graduation from High School: "Given a list of 25 words from the Thomas Pollock List, read orally by the evaluator, the student will write the words so that they are legible to the evaluator, with at least 80% accuracy." Students pretested each other

using the Pollock list from which the B.C. test was derived. By the end of the pretesting session, each student had a list of words to learn and a partner with whom to work. The teacher's role was to:

1. train the partners using the ASPIRE (Carter, 1979) procedure
2. monitor the partners to correct inaccuracies in the procedure
3. test the students periodically for B.C. mastery and retention

2. Partnerships for the teachers

The task facing professionals who are expected to teach groups of children with diverse social and academic needs is awesome. The implementation of P.L. 94-142 has led many teachers to seek mutual assistance in the form of partnerships. In many cases this has led to consulting and professional pairing to work toward the common goal of educating children with handicaps with their normal peers to the greatest extent possible. Teachers who develop professional partnerships in schools will find rewards which extend beyond teaching together in classrooms to developing quality relationships with their collegues. Using each other as resources, teaching partners can cooperatively plan the curriculum, devise new teaching strategies and go together to the "front line" of the classroom to take risks in using their new strategies with the students. Where strategies need revision team-partners can collaborate

to improve their technology. Working together to acheive a common goal, teaching partners can congratulate each other on their successes and cooperatively brainstorm for solutions to their problems. Teaching in a classroom can be a lonely business, especialiy in schools which are physically and organizationally structured to exclude opportunities for collegues to get together during the school day.

In one New England high school, team teaching provided a vehicle for serving learning disabled students in a regular class setting. (Knight, Stahlbrand). Working together, English teachers and special educators teamed to design a curriculum which focused on reading and writing skills as well as the State-mandated Basic Competencies. Among other things, the teacher partners designed a tool for evaluating student writing and structured classroom activities using strategies which had proven effective for improving spelling and writing skills. In the team-taught classes, students have the opportunity to focus on basic academic skills, while increasing their interactions with other students. This is in contrast to many approaches which are designed to serve learning disabled students in Resource Rooms or in individualized, independent, or in self-paced programs. Working and planning collaboratively, the teachers are able to use each other's diverse expertise to support the program for the students and each other.

3. Increasing individualized attention for low performers

"Peer tutoring takes pressure off the teacher by

allowing him to teach a large group fo students; at the same time, it allows the slow learners the individual attention they need." (Johnson, Learning Together & Alone). In addition, peer tutoring is one way for teachers to begin focusing on an important goal: developing in non-handicapped youngsters an appropriate sensitivity to peers with handicaps.

Because of time and class size constraints, few teachers have the luxury of providing much classroom time to individual students. In fact, there is some evidence that teachers who provide individualized instruction to one or two students are less effective overall in terms of achievement gains for the class than teachers who work with small or large groups. (Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974). As long as individual students have different learning rates, students will be forced into situations where they either have to proceed to the next skill in the sequence without having mastered the current objective, or they have to wait for the rest of the class to reach their level of mastery. By its very nature, grouping for instruction will always mean that one or two students are not working on the skill which is appropriate for them in that mement and are therefore spending less time focussed on the tasks they need. Thus, it follows that time students spend on appropriate tasks could be increased by increasing the number of people who can work with individual students. Structuring peer tutoring partnerships in the classroom is one way for teachers to expand their arsenal of available resources to stretch the system

to increase the likelihood that students will be receiving the individual attention they need.

For low performing students, the opportunity to deal actively with the subject matter is expanded if teachers present material to groups of students first, with time allowed for students to work in pairs following the group presentation. Thus, slow learning students are not only exposed to the material, but they have increased time working in a partnership to listen, to respond and to use the new material. It is this repetition which is the critical variable for learning disabled students, the chance to increase the time during which they are actively engaged with the academic material. If a learning disabled 4th grader is allowed to teach the math facts (s) he has just learned to a 2nd grader, the process of teaching the new material to another student acts as powerful reinforcer of the material already learned. In one study (Cloward, 1967) where low performing high school students worked as tutors for low achieving elementary students, the tutored children made moderate growth. However, the tutors themselves also progressed in their skill development and the researchers concluded that the tutors had learned from the experience of teaching others.

4. Positive attitudes

The research strongly supports the proposition that partner learning encourages positive interpersonal relationships among students and between students and teacher. (Weigel, Wiser & Cook, 1974). "Positive interpersonal relationships with students is necessary both for effective

problem solving in groups and for general classroom enjoyment of instructional activity". (Johnson, 1975, p. 188). Student attitudes and achievements in math were found to be more positive when students had been studying with each other than when they had been studying individually. (Johnson, et.al. 1977). The result of this study indicates that partner learning promotes positive attitudes toward peers and teachers. An increase in self-esteem and higher scholastic achievement were also noted. Other positive effects include "general mutual concern among students; liking of school; student time on-task; peer norms supporting academic achievement; preference for cooperation and altruism; and internal focus of control". (Slavin, p.2)

5. Cost-Effectiveness

Program costs are another factor which deserve attention in connection with partner learning rationale. For programs to be considered cost-effective, they must first be effective. In one model cost-effectiveness study (Armstrong, Conlon, Pierson & Stahlbrand, 1979) high school seniors were trained to work with special education students in math. Results showed that trained tutors and paraprofessional adults were equally effective in producing student achievement, but that expenses associated with the paraprofessionals were over three times greater than those for the high school tutors.

There is an abundance of research supporting the reciprocal benefits of partner learning. The aforementioned studies serve to illustrate a number of applications of the concept to date.

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